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ABSTRACT

Over the last six years, corporation-community college partnerships have played an increasingly important role in educational and industrial growth. The automotive industry has been at the forefront of this trend and has recognized the contributions that community colleges can make in meeting the educational needs of industry. One example is the Chrysler Dealer Apprenticeship Program (CAP). The program was initiated to act as a "feeder system" to supply high qualified entry-level technicians to Chrysler dealerships on a national basis. CAP involves a combination of education and work experience, with the student alternately spending two months attending college and two months working at a dealership. At the end of two years, the student receives an Associate in Applied Science Degree in Automotive Technology and is guaranteed a job with the dealer where the apprenticeship has been served. Colleges interested in establishing a similar program should consider the following problems and needs: (1) general education requirements for associate degrees should be upheld in the program; (2) while students will take all of their automotive technology classes together, they should be encouraged to mix with other students in general education courses; (3) although the corporation provides equipment and faculty training, the need for a special facility dedicated to the project and relatively low class sizes means that the program will be expensive for the college; (4) to protect the corporation's investment, the community college must ensure that its teaching methods are appropriate, that its faculty remains up to date with new technological developments, and that its graduates are knowledgeable and competent; (5) the dealer must be able to interview and select apprenticeship candidates, though the college must ensure that affirmative action practices are followed; and (6) as the program requires a full-time commitment, employed, part-time students would be eliminated from consideration. (ALB)

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Corporation-Community College Partnerships: High Technology Apprentice Training

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I am David Conklin, Dean for Academic Affairs at Mercer County Community College in New Jersey. During today's presentation, I will discuss the growing trend in corporation-community college partnerships, with special emphasis on the Chrysler Dealer Apprenticeship Program. CAP, as it is called, is a relatively new venture involving a multi-national corporation, local businessmen, and community colleges. It was started to address the need for qualified technicians to work in local Chrysler dealerships.

When Dale Parnell was first appointed President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges in 1981, he was asked to assess the likely direction of the community college movement in the 1980's and beyond. In his response, he correctly forecast that community colleges would be asked to fill a major role as an educational resource for employment development and that institutions would be providing more training for business and industry. He envisioned that community colleges would become part of the "new productivity" that was being talked about so much at that time.

Over the past six years, community colleges have been asked to play an even more prominent role in providing specialized training as business and industry have expanded their investment in human resources. Because the nation's corporations must spend over 60 billion dollars each year on internal educational programs, business and industry are beginning to view community colleges as educational institutions that have the ability to efficiently produce a trained workforce in an era of rapid social and technological change. Increasingly, business and industry recognize that community colleges are in the unique position of being able to establish new educational programs to satisfy emerging needs.

It has long been argued that there should be a bridge of understanding and close cooperation between educational institutions and private sector employers. Bridging the gap between community college resources and employer needs requires that community college educators attempt to understand the personnel needs of business and industry. Employers, for the most part, need employees who can read, write, do arithmetic, have good communications skills, can analyze and solve problems, and who possess demonstrated occupational skills. Likewise, business and industrial leaders must realize that a direct relationship does not readily exist between supply and demand in specific job categories.

The automotive industry has been at the forefront of recognizing the contributions that community colleges can make in meeting the educational needs of the industry. In the early 1970's, the National Automobile Dealers Association conducted a nationwide community college program to recruit and train 13,000 apprentice automotive mechanics a year. Recently, Ford Motor Company and the United Auto Workers cooperated in the establishment of a national development and training program designating community colleges as the principle training institutes for unemployed Ford workers.

General Motors Corporation has established the Automotive Service Educational Program to serve its training needs. Through ASEP, General Motors has formed a national partnership with community colleges to provide skilled service technicians for General Motors dealers. ASEP was launched in 1979 in a pilot effort that established a two-year, associate degree program for job entry-level automotive service students. The ASEP Program, considered a resounding success by General Motors, now includes a network of over 35 community colleges.

The Chrysler Corporation has also recognized that the revolution in technology is bringing about an equally dramatic increase in training requirements. Not only have more sophisticated technical systems been introduced in the manufacture of automobiles, but to meet market challenges, these changes have come about at an unprecedented pace. Representatives of Chrysler Corporation indicate that the industry is conservatively five years behind in its ability to repair and service the highly technical micro-electronic and computer controlled components found in today's cars. They realize that the mechanic of the past will have to be replaced by the highly skilled service technician.

Chrysler representatives have also concluded that generic automotive technology programs, such as those traditionally found in vocational schools at the secondary level and at some community colleges, do not meet the needs of Chrysler dealers in terms of providing employees who can understand and repair the new generation of automobiles. As a result, the Chrysler Corporation launched the Chrysler Dealer Apprenticeship Program that would act as a "feeder system" to supply highly qualified entry-level technicians to Chrysler dealerships on a national basis. As with the General Motors ASEP Program, the Chrysler Dealer Apprenticeship Program involves a combination of education and experience: a student alternately attends college for two months, then goes to work at a dealership for two months. At the end of two years, the student receives an Associate in Applied Science Degree in Automotive Technology and is guaranteed a job with the dealer where the apprenticeship has been served.

The apprenticeship concept is not new. A system of "learning by doing" under the guidance of a master craftsman has endured for over 4,000 years. A variation of the traditional apprenticeship is again being recognized as an effective vehicle for educating young people in certain skill areas. Traditionally, apprenticeship has meant

that an individual is learning a trade or skill under the supervision of a journeyman by working full time at the trade and studying the related theory and practice at the same time.

Over a decade ago, apprenticeship programs at community colleges meant that trade union members would receive credit toward an Associate Degree for the training they received during their apprenticeship. In a survey conducted by AACJC in 1977, over half of the 523 institutions responding indicated they had joint apprenticeship programs with unions. While some community colleges have attempted to establish non-union sponsored apprenticeship programs in a limited number of skilled trades occupations, these efforts have not proven to be successful over the long term. The reason most often given for this failure is the lack of a close association between employers and those responsible for the educational component of the apprenticeship program.

Establishing an innovative automotive industry apprenticeship program is a challenge, but one that has the potential for being successful for all parties involved: the corporation, the local dealer, the community college, and the student. If this closely supervised apprenticeship effort is successful, it could serve as the model for other industries and corporations to study and perhaps emulate.

As with any new venture, a myriad of problems need to be recognized and resolved when initiating an automotive apprenticeship program. Because of the unique nature of an apprenticeship program, with students alternately working full time and going to school full time, apprentices take all their classes together. While this situation can allow for the content of general education courses to be adjusted to match the interests of students enrolled in the automotive apprenticeship program, the basic premise behind having a liberal arts requirement in all associate degree programs

needs to be reinforced. Because 75% of all community college students eventually take courses leading to a baccalaureate degree, the content of general education courses should be sufficiently grounded in the discipline and rigorous enough so that students can easily transfer them to upper division institutions.

Also, most community colleges have tried to mix students as much as possible in general education courses for two reasons. The first is to provide an economy of scale leading to greater efficiency, and the second, and perhaps most important, is to ensure that students are exposed to other students not enrolled in the same curriculum. This mixing of students does not take place in an apprenticeship program because of its basic nature.

Although the corporation provides equipment and training services for faculty as part of its contribution to the success of the apprenticeship program, community colleges should recognize that these programs are relatively expensive due to the need to have a dedicated facility and the relatively low class size required to manage an apprenticeship program successfully.

Realistically, any corporation that commits between one quarter million to one-half million dollars to a venture wants to insure its success. An educational endeavor is no exception. Sponsoring an apprenticeship program requires the cooperating community college to insure that its teaching methods are appropriate, that its faculty remain current and up-to-date with new technological developments, and that its graduates are knowledgeable and competent. The corporation and participating dealers have a right to expect that their investment will be protected. However, this is not normally the case with most academic programs offered by community colleges, which serve a variety of employers. But because an apprenticeship program is

designed to serve the training needs of one employer, that employer will be knowledgeable about the success or failure of the program.

For an automotive apprenticeship program to be effective, the dealer must be able to interview and select apprentice candidates. The dealer naturally approaches the selection of the apprentice in the same way as the recruitment and hiring of any other employee. However, as public institutions, community colleges have a societal responsibility to ensure that sound affirmative action practices are followed in the recruitment and education of students. The potential for abuse in selection or rejection of qualified apprentices does exist, and community colleges should be vigilant to make sure that participating dealers understand their responsibility to be fair and objective in the selection of apprentices.

By their nature, apprenticeship programs are limited to those individuals who can study and work as apprentices on a full-time basis. This situation therefore eliminates from consideration the largest segment of the enrollment at most community colleges, the employed, part-time student.

The problems presented by the establishment of an automotive apprenticeship program are not insurmountable and should be viewed as challenges rather than debilitating faults. Cooperative relationships with business and industry are a manifestation of one of the basic tenets of the community college philosophy--to provide high quality educational programs responsive to community and employer needs.

At Mercer County Community College, we are proud and honored to be involved in the Chrysler Dealer Apprenticeship Program. We believe that in addition to meeting an identified need for one industry, it can serve as a model for other

industries to follow. The success of programs like this one help to reinforce the crucial role that community colleges play in educating individuals to contribute to the betterment of society.

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